
Sustainability: Sample Actions

The following list captures some of the many activities housing co-ops across Canada have taken on to improve their environmental sustainability (mostly in the 2010s).

Sustainable Programming

- Form a “Green Committee” (for education or to monitor opportunities for retrofit programs and grants from utilities)
- Complete the Building Energy Audit initiative through CHF BC and train members to annually report on the status of green initiatives.
- Calculate the co-op’s carbon footprint
- Provide energy audits of units for members who request it
- Develop “Green Procurement Procedures” (to consider how the co-op can incorporate environmentally-friendly options when upgrading building components.)
- Donate free parking space to the local car co-op or other car-sharing organization
- Use our newsletter to publish tips on how to save money and improve sustainability
- Encourage and support cycling by having a bike room and/or installing bike racks
- Encourage car-pooling and support public transportation
- Encourage members to recycle through various programs (municipal, on-site)
- Encourage members to switch to CFL or LED lighting in their units (including offering CFL giveaways to members)
- Encourage eco-friendly cleaning during our semi-annual clean-up days or generally
- Encourage cold water usage in the common laundry room
- Encourage avoidance of electric driers by giving away free retractable clothesline to members
- Don’t permit en suite laundry facilities but instead offer high-efficiency laundry machines as a common facility
- Plant new trees in green spaces (to sequester carbon dioxide, and to provide summer shade to keep co-op units at comfortable temperatures without air conditioning)

Waste Management

- Establish or expand on-site composting (household compostable waste bins, municipal green waste bins for landscaping waste, open yard waste bins for other leaves and grass clippings)
 - Recycle paper, plastic, glass, metal, and building materials (e.g. metal removed from the building, such as pipes and appliances; wood beams to be used in composting system; old pavement in landscaping)
 - Instituted co-mingled recycling program to improve diversion from land-fills
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- Re-use furnishings and other household goods by making them available to others (laundry “free box” or annual trading days)
- Collect electronics and batteries for best reuse or disposal, separate from our garbage (e.g. bring in steel walk-in bins in the spring, one for household items and the other for electronic items for recycling; hire a independent contractor to remove large appliances and water tanks and take them to scrap metal yard to be recycled)
- Participate in Annual Earth Day or other co-op clean-up events

Reduce Unnecessary Water Consumption and Improve Water Management

- Replace or repair any leaky taps and pipes
- Replace toilets with new low-flush toilets
- Install low-flow showers (all in one go or gradually)
- Install aerators in faucets
- Install water catchment bins to sustain landscaping on co-op grounds
- Replace impermeable asphalt (e.g. parking lot pavements) with permeable surfaces
- In gardens, use native plants that don’t need to be watered as much as lawns

Reduce Demand for New Resource Extraction, Creation of Non-biodegradable or Toxic Materials

- Repair, rather than replace, appliances (whenever possible)
- Limit the number of documents (agendas, minutes, etc.) distributed to directors on the co-op board, to committees and to office staff
- Reuse envelopes in the office and purchase organic printer ink
- Use eco-friendly janitorial supplies
- Use only water-based paint (paint that emits no/minimal volatile organic compounds)
- Purchase paints and other construction products that are environmentally friendly (e.g. by using recycled materials)
- Refinish wood floors with a water-based finish
- Replace common area carpets with a 100%-recycled product
- Construct fences from recycled wood preserved with bio-degradable products
- Request that no scents be used in our common laundry
- Permit no smoking in common areas
- Institute a “no industrially produced chemicals on our gardens” policy (no pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers)
- Use peat, steer manure and compost for amending the soil



- Host a common kitchen in the co-op common room through a community group which teaches economic, nutritious food preparation (reducing the use of pre-packaged food)
- Plant raised vegetable gardens or host community gardens on co-op property (locally grown food reduces the need for transportation and packaging)

Improving Energy Efficiency

- Connect external, locker room or laundry room lights to photocell or timers (to reduce energy use when lighting is not needed)
- Change “EXIT” signs to LED models
- Use LED holiday lights on timers to minimize electrical consumption
- Retrofit exterior, hallway, laundry room and parkade lighting (e.g. convert underground and stairwell light fixtures from T8 to T4)
- Close down the heating system throughout the building during the summer months
- Replace inefficient appliances with Energy Star-rated models
- Use variable speed make-up air unit to conserve energy
- Use a recirculation pump on the hot water tank
- Use a manual push lawn mower to cut the grass
- Provide energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs to members’ units
- Install programmable thermostats in all units heated with a furnace
- Install low-emissivity (low-e) argon gas-filled energy-efficient windows
- Heat units with a hot water system
- Insulate the underground garage door with plastic to reduce heat loss
- Install high efficiency (e.g. R50) and environmentally-sensitive insulation in attic when replacing the roof
- Clean dryer vents regularly to improve efficiency
- Install screen doors to allow members to keep units cool with natural air circulation rather than air conditioning
- Use power bars in common areas to ensure that appliances do not use electricity all the time

Investigating New Technologies

- Install solar panels on the co-op roof (or look at potential benefits of doing so)
- Investigate subsidies for programmable thermostats and other energy-efficient retrofits
- Explore the possibility of connecting the co-op to a neighbourhood energy utility
- Explore more sustainable de-icing option for winter
- Investigate more energy efficient heating sources such as natural gas (currently units are heated by electric baseboards)